

## **Doon Watch Nature Series for Dehradun Live Hindustan Times by Sanjay Sondhi**

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### **Weird mesh cocoons!**

The purpose of writing a series such as Doon Watch, is to share the wonderful sights of nature, with others, who might have the inclination, but not the time or the knowledge to peer into nature's incredible world. Whenever I interact with someone who shares his or her insight into nature, it is a moment of celebration for me! Such an incident happened quite recently at the State Bank of India at Jakhan. I was sitting at the bank, with S. S. Kar, one of the bank employees, getting some work done. S. S. Kar told me about an amazing television program on birds that he had seen. While we were talking, he mentioned that he had recently seen an incredible cocoon, which had a mesh-like cover. I immediately knew what he was talking about, as the cocoon he described is seen quite commonly around Dehradun.

The cocoon, belongs to a moth family, called the Footman moths. The amazing cocoon consists of an intricate structure, which looks like a mesh-like igloo! Inside this mesh, is the actual cocoon, either suspended, or resting on the upper surface of a leaf. The mesh-like structure is constructed by the caterpillar using its own hair! The caterpillar does this by binding together ends of its hairs with its silk. While I had not seen the caterpillar build this structure, recently, S. S. Rasaily, the former Director of Rajaji National Park was fortunate not only to see the caterpillar build its cocoon, but he also filmed it! The mesh-like structure that the caterpillar builds is really strong-if you happen to touch it with your fingers, it rebounds, and it is quite firmly constructed.



Many moth species build cocoons in this manner. While I have not reared this

caterpillar, more than likely, the adult moth is a commonly found species in Dehradun called *Cyana bianca*. The small moth is largely white, with narrow black and red bands on its wings. The moths are seen in large numbers. At the verandah of an office building in Rajaji National Park, I counted close to a hundred such cocoons on the walls!

A question that continues to bug me, is why the caterpillar spends so much time and energy to build this structure. Could it be protection? Does it keep away some specific predator? Or does it just like building fancy structures! I don't yet know the answers; but intriguing mysteries of this kind keep my interest in nature alive!

Feedback on this column is welcome at [sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com](mailto:sanjay.sondhi1@gmail.com)

Making a difference: Have you observed any interesting sights in nature? If so, find out more about them, by visiting the internet or even writing into me. And suddenly, you may find a whole new interesting world of nature may open to you!

Photograph caption: Cocoon of *Cyana bianca*

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